

TESTIMONY OF  
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STATE OF HAWAII

BEFORE THE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS

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REGARDING HAWAII'S SUPPORT FOR THE CORAL REEF CONSERVATION ACT OF 2000

Chairmen and members of the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans, it is an honor to be here to testify today on behalf of Peter Young Chairperson, Department of Land and Natural Resources, on a matter of vital importance to our Islands. Before I begin my testimony on the Coral Reef Conservation Act, I would first like to begin by discussing the crucial role that Hawaii's reefs play in our way of life.

Introduction:

Hawaii is one of the most isolated archipelagos in the world and as a result possesses some of the highest numbers of marine plants and animals not found anywhere else in the world. Most of these are found on our coral reefs. Our coral reefs are important to us economically, culturally, for our food, and for maintenance of our lifestyle. Hawaii's coral reefs protect us from storm waves, provide us with our sandy beaches, create our world famous surf breaks, attract people globally to our shorelines, and are where we go to spend our leisure time.

Coral reefs were important to the ancient Hawaiians for subsistence, culture and survival. According to the Hawaiian creation chant, the kumulipo, the coral polyp was the first creature to emerge from the sea during the time of creation. The early Hawaiians recognized that coral reefs are a building block of our islands and used coral in religious ceremonies to honor and care for ocean resources.

Today, tourism is the engine that drives Hawaii's economy. It is our number one industry valued at over \$11 billion annually. State projections estimate that nearly 7 million visitors will arrive in our islands in 2005. Hawaii's beaches rank number one year after year in the annual ranking of America's best beaches. Our reefs generate an estimated \$800 million in gross revenues from tourism annually. While not all tourists who come to the Islands participate in ocean recreation activities, over 80% do participate in some form of ocean recreation from sunbathing and swimming, to snorkeling and surfing, to jet skiing and parasailing. All of this activity occurs within one mile from shore on, around and through our coral reefs.

Hawaii also consistently ranks as one of the top dive destinations in diver surveys. Nearly 52% of all visitors from the West participate in diving or snorkeling activities during their stay in our Islands. Other than just simple beach going, snorkeling and scuba diving activities outrank all other forms of recreational activities participated in by both U.S and Japanese visitors to Hawaii.

The concentrated numbers of visitors coupled with our State's over 1.5 million residents has put pressure on Hawaii's coral reefs.

U.S. Coral Reef Task Force

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force has been a model of federal/state collaboration. From its inception, the Co-Chairs in the Departments of the Interior and Commerce have recognized that the majority of coral reefs lie within the jurisdictions of the State's and Territories and have worked with them as partners to develop action plans and strategies that meet the needs of both the nation and the local stakeholders. As one of their first acts they invited the Governor's to be equal members and this has resulted in the ability to dialog and have access to high ranking members of the administration and their staff as we work together to address the threats to our nation's coral reefs. Hawaii has been and will continue to play a large role in the efforts of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

Coral Reef Conservation Act

Even before the Coral Reef Conservation Act was implemented, the steering committee of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force

had developed a National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs. To the best of our ability and with small pots of funding from our federal partners; we were beginning to address the threats to our reefs. However, the Act provided a significant increase in funding and called for the development of strategic approaches to addressing the myriad of threats that had been identified in the National Action Plan. The funding provided under the Coral Reef Conservation Act has allowed us to address a number of actions that have lead to a better understanding of both the importance of our coral reefs and how to address the threats to these resources. Funds for strategic research have enabled us to put a dollar value to the importance of our reefs economically, funds have allowed us to monitor and assess the effectiveness of 150 miles of coastline that were set aside in a network of marine protected areas, funds were used to work with community groups to clean up over 80 tons of discarded fishing gear on remote beaches throughout the state. The list of accomplishments is long and we are very proud of our efforts to date.

## Local Action Strategies

At the October 2002 U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting in Puerto Rico, resolutions were adopted to identify focus areas, increase capacity through improved coordination among and between federal, state/territory agencies, and to strengthen local participation. The Task Force agreed to focus on six key threats to U.S. coral reef ecosystems: land based sources of pollution, over-fishing, recreational overuse, lack of public awareness, coral disease, and climate change and coral bleaching and asked each jurisdiction to develop Local Action Strategies to address those threat areas that are most applicable within that jurisdiction. These threats are the basis of a new coordinated effort between federal and state agencies. We have been involved with our federal agencies partners and are engaged in developing and implementing three-year local action strategies for the key threats to Hawaii. Hawaii's has identified the threats of lack of public awareness, land-based sources of pollution, overfishing, aquatic alien species, and recreational overuse/misuse as the key threat areas to our reefs.

The successes of the efforts to develop the Local Action Strategies have been outstanding. For the first time ever, in many cases, the groups that might not have been traditionally engaged in conversations about how their actions impacted coral reefs are talking and working together. I will focus my remarks to giving examples of just two of our efforts.

One of the best examples I have of this new communication was when we brought the coral reef scientist and the agriculture, soil erosion and non-point sources experts together in the same room for a workshop to discuss how best to address the impacts from land-based sources of pollution. It was for the most part, the first time any of them had ever talked to each other.

With our partners in the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture taking the lead locally, we developed a Land-Based Sources of Pollution Local Action Strategy that has already raised, to date, \$1.3 million dollars to be obligated for priority projects. Out of a total of 54 projects, 30 (55%) are fully funded. It is through the partnerships we have developed with the federal agencies and the on the ground actions that are occurring in the communities that we have been able to see the successes.

Another example I will focus on is our efforts to raise awareness. Our lack of public awareness LAS is a collaborative campaign that brings together over 40 agencies and organizations to raise general awareness about the importance of our reefs to our way of life. The campaign was launched this past June at a press conference with the Governor, Lt. Governor and the Mayors of all 4 counties.

One of the key collaborative parts of the overall campaign is how it has built upon itself once the momentum started. To date, over \$100,000 in donations has been provided by private companies, and foundations including, Tiffany and Company Jewelers, the Hawaii hotel and restaurant industries, the local newspapers.

Our efforts in all sectors have not only been successful in building collaboration among numerous stakeholders but have also allowed up to use one source of funds to leverage other sources of funds and in all cases to build a bigger pot. We have been creative in seeking funding from foundations and the private sector in addition to resources within the agencies. I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge the efforts that have been provided by both the Department of Commerce and Interior in the development and funding of the Local Action Strategies.

## Additional Funding for the Coral Reef Conservation Act

The allocation of an additional \$2.7 million that was requested as a part of the President's budget will allow us to utilize more of our state funds to match federal funds dollar to dollar to address the pressing problems we are struggling with regarding the prevention and eradication of aquatic alien species. The additional funds will also allow us to proceed with the implementation of the 24 percent of projects not funded under our Land-Based Source of Pollution LAS. These funds will allow us to seek more creative mechanisms to partner to broaden the messages about the importance of our reefs. The funds will

allow us to finalize and begin to implement our Recreational Overuse LAS and to implement more projects outlined in our Coral Reef Fisheries LAS. Lastly, these funds will provide us with more opportunities to fill critical staff shortages so we can continue to do the good work we have been doing.

#### Additional Coral Reef Protection Should be Provided Under the Act

The Coral Reef Conservation Act goes a long way in providing the funds we need to address the critical threats to our coral reefs and in organizing these efforts through strategic approaches, but does not go far enough in protecting these critical natural resources that are so vital to our Islands. The Act as currently written also does not codify the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

One of our biggest challenges in working with the federal agencies in implementing the Local Action Strategies is the inability for the agencies to co-mingle funds to address the threats that have been identified. While we have become increasingly more creative in seeking these funds and implementing the actions, the paperwork that is associated with trying to manage grants from each agency, each with its own reporting requirements and grant timelines has been challenging. The Act should allow for a mechanism to pool federal agency resources to address those actions that have been outlined in the Local Action Strategies so that we do not have to continue to track multiple grants going to address the same project at the local level.

#### Conclusion

In closing, I would like to stress that the management challenges faced by the need to address the ever-growing threats to Hawaii's coral reefs are significant. However, it is through our multi-agency and community partnerships that we have made great strides in addressing some of these challenges. We need to focus our energies and efforts on ensuring that we continue these partnerships and the funding associated with these federal/state collaborative initiatives, and use our creative and collective energies to find solutions to respond to the threats to our reefs.

Again, mahalo for this opportunity to testify before you today